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Television Business International

Issue #4 April 2016

The magazine celebrating television's golden era of scripted programming

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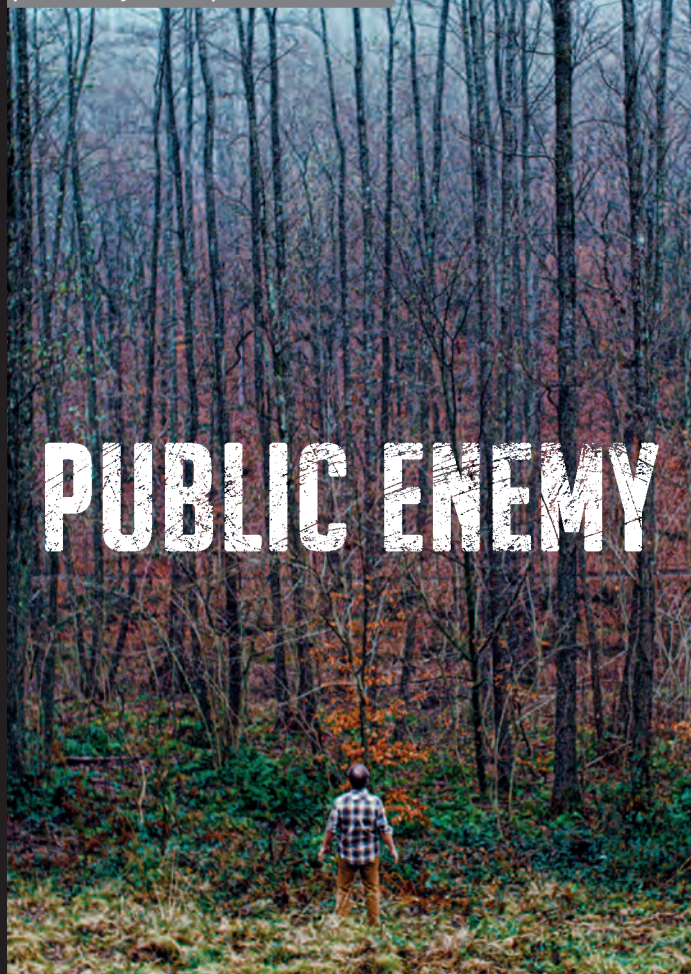
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Editor's Note



History has always been the most fertile soil for scriptwriters: what is more dramatic than the events of real-life, after all?

History plays a pretty big role in this issue of TBI Scripted, too. Our in-depth reports on new high-end dramas coming to market take us to post-World War II Paris and the brutal 18th and 19th Century worlds of the United States.

The Collection – an Amazon Studios, BBC Worldwide, France 3, Lookout Point and Federation Entertainment coproduction – is set in a high-end Parisian house that emerged at the end of WWII, while *Roots*, a reworking of the revolutionary 1977 ABC miniseries, takes a harrowing journey into the world of African slave trading that existed in early America before and after the country's official establishment on July 4, 1776, while showing how an enslaved family survives the hardships.

Making one of history's larger-than-life figures, Queen Victoria, relatable, was the challenge for Daisy Goodwin, who we know best in TV circles as the former 'head girl' of Silver River Productions, the UK factual producer she founded. Her first-person account of writing an ITV drama about the younger years of the famous British royal, who ruled the United Kingdom from 1837 to 1901, focuses on imaging how a person goes from being a youthful teenager to the most powerful person in England overnight.

Imagining the future is an equally popular activity for television's best writing talent. We hear from *Braquo* creator Olivier Marchal, who tells us about his new dystopian drama *Section Zero*, which considers a Europe in which evil mega-corporations have taken control of the continent and the police are forced to become gun-toting freedom fighters.

Author Lawrence Hill had a similar idea with *The Illegal*, which we review in our regular feature 'Award winner'. Set in a dark near-future Europe, the Canada-created series, which went down a treat in Berlin's European Film Market, pulls in themes relevant to today's world, such as immigration and how we treat refugees.

Our immediate future at TBI Scripted is a trip to Cannes for MIPTV, where the first MIPDrama Screenings will take place. We'll see you there, or perhaps at the Monte-Carlo Television Festival.

TV drama? It's history in the making.

Jesse Whittock

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Legitimate success for *The Illegal*



At the CoPro Series pitching competition in Berlin, the team behind *The Book of Negroes* was successful with a dystopian drama with dark tones that strikes a chord with contemporary current affairs

With the mass coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis, it was perhaps inevitable that a show covering similar themes would catch attention of investors at the CoPro Series pitching event in Berlin at the Berlinale Co-Production Market in February.

The Illegal, about an African immigrant living illegally in a dystopian European state, was named the winner of the competition, meaning its producers now go on to present at the Séries Mania competition in Paris this month, as part of a 'project exchange programme'.

The official selection for the competition also included German effort *The Disappearance*, which is from 23/5 Filmproduktion, Dutch drama *Avrupa* (Circe Films), Israel's *Wars Inc.* (Drama Team) and Scandinavian pair *Brotherhood*

(Friland Produksjon) and *Lucky Per* (Nordisk Film Production).

Despite being a film-actor-turned-veteran-producer, Damon D'Oliveira, co-founder of *Illegal* producer Conquering Lion Pictures, says pitching in front of 350 people was a "nerve wracking, first-time experience", adding: "This was my first time doing a public pitch; I normally just meet people over coffee."

In the event, it was worthwhile. After beating off competition to win the contest, he had 22 meetings in Germany's capital city and has been inundated with interest since returning to Canada.

He speaks to TBI from a town in the far north of the country, while on a location scouting mission. The freezing temperatures outside are -37C.

D'Oliveira is best known as the production partner of director-screenwriter Clement Virgo and frequent collaborator Lawrence Hill. The trio worked up CBC's critically acclaimed *The Book of Negroes*, which last year gave the Canadian broadcaster its biggest ratings for an original drama since *The Road to Avonlea* in January 1990.

The result for cable net BET in US cable was similarly strong numbers.

The Book of Negroes was screened at Berlinale/EFM's first Drama Series Day last year, which D'Oliveira describes as "a great experience". After that, the festival's organisers asked the production team if they had other projects that could be pitched, bringing our story into 2016. D'Oliveira quips that the organisers loved *The Illegal* as "it wasn't a crime drama set in Europe".

It is, in fact, based on a best-selling Hill novel, just as *The Book of Negroes* was. The new project follows a talented African runner who lives in the corrupt, fictional, near-future state of Zantoroland.

After a government coup destroys his family, Ali is forced to seek asylum in Freedom State, a mostly-white, authoritarian nightmare of a democracy that the producers say is reminiscent of Airstrip One in George Orwell's 1984. He soon falls in with residents of an underground community, Africtown, where those hunted by the state can find security for a price. He is then forced to take part in a series of gruelling marathons that D'Oliveira says gives the proposed eight-part series a "*Hunger Games* element".

The project was in the works long before the Suzanne Collins novel series was turned into films, however. "Lawrence Hill conceptualised *The Illegal* back in the 1980s, when his sister lived in Berlin," says D'Oliveira. "He realised that – at that point – there were lots of illegal Western African refugees who didn't have a real existence. He became fascinated with these people."

Tonally, *The Illegal* shares sensibilities with intellectual, dystopian feature films popular



historian and author of the black experience in Canada, Hill was a runner as a teen who firmly believed he would win the 5,000 metres at the Olympics.

This passion is a clear influence on *The Illegal*, whose lead character is forced into races reminiscent of the Tough Mudder endurance contests currently popular around the world with ultra-competitive athletes.

As with *The Book of Negroes*, CBC is an early investor in the project, and the broadcaster has put the eight-part miniseries into development.

The project is expected to be a Canadian-European-South African coproduction, and cost around €16 million (US\$17.7 million), meaning an average episode cost of €2 million.

Conquering Lion plans to shoot the African scenes in South Africa, where shows such as Starz's *Black Sails* and movies including *Marvel's Avengers: Age of Ultron* have filmed in recent times.

Incentives offering up to 25% rebates to overseas companies are available in the territory, making it even more attractive.

Meanwhile, a European partner that can provide between 30% and 40% of the budget and locations for the Freedom State scenes is being sought following the Berlin pitch. Production is planned for 2017 ahead of an airdate in 2018, though for D'Oliveira, Virgo and Hill the next stop is Paris. **S**

in the mid-2000s. "Clement Virgo is a huge fan of *Children of Men* as an intelligent view of the future," says D'Oliveira, who adds there are also shades of Amazon Prime Instant Video alternative history drama series *The Man in the High Castle*.

Another theme is one commonly found in the work of D'Oliveira, Virgo and Hill: race. Jamaica-born Virgo's film *Poor Boy's Game*, which debuted in Berlin in February 2007, examined racial and class struggles through

the filter of boxing in the Canadian city of Halifax. Virgo also directed two episodes of HBO's masterpiece *The Wire*, and he is closely associated with Black History Month's efforts in Toronto.

Hill is a mixed-race man who grew up in a predominantly white Toronto suburb. His locally famous parents were heavily involved with civil rights campaigns and founded the Ontario Black History Society.

Though he has become a noted journalist,





In the spotlight: Stephen Poliakoff

British writer and director Stephen Poliakoff's award-winning work spans more than three decades on both the big and small screen. Much of his TV output has been for the BBC, starting with one-off television plays and then taking in notable series such as *Perfect Strangers*, *Friends & Crocodiles*, *The Lost Prince* and *Gideon's Daughter*.

Having more recently made 1930s drama *Dancing on the Edge*, which was well-received on both sides of the Atlantic, he is back with another period piece for the BBC, *Close to the Enemy*, which is from Endor Productions. Set in bombed-out post-war London, it follows British intelligence efforts to recruit a German scientist to their cause. All3Media International will launch the show at MIPTV

Poliakoff tells Stewart Clarke about his new series, and his influences.

My inspiration for *Close to the Enemy*

The genesis came about after I had finished *Dancing on the Edge* and was talking with the BBC about a second season. I had written a lot about the thirties, the era in which *Dancing on the Edge* is set, but was also excited about taking another pivotal moment in modern history, so *Close to the Enemy* is a sort of follow-up.

It is set the year after the Second World War has finished, the incredible moment when the Cold War was already starting. We, the victorious allies, were literally grabbing people off the streets of Germany who we thought might be useful, bringing them over here and trying to get them to work for us, especially in the defence industry. Society was still semi-militarised and armed forces were still in stately homes and schools, and using hotels to entertain or put up those people snatched from Germany.

Adrenaline was pumping through everyone during the war – whether they were in the action or a city that was being bombed – and suddenly that all stopped. Of course, that adrenaline didn't stop.

My approach to the period setting

When things are set after the war, they are often film-noir-like, foggy and rainy. But the reality was that the light was blindingly bright, especially in the summer, because there were so many holes in the streets and so many blocks were gone. Where there used to be a large building in front of you, there was often nothing.

I've tried to give the show that look: very visceral and alive, and different from what is associated with that time.

How I research my stories

I work with a researcher and do a lot on each subject I'm tackling. I have an idea of a story and then see if history backs it up.

This one is on an epic scale and churns along at a pace. Normally my work is associated with a rather hallucinatory, poetic style, but this one heaves along because of the jagged nature of that time.

The emerging talent I have worked to bring through

I have worked with a lot of people at the beginning of their stellar careers.

Emily Blunt won a Golden Globe for *Gideon's Daughter*, and she wasn't really known to the public before. That, along with *The Devil Wears Prada*, was her breakthrough role.

Similarly, years ago I worked with Clive Owen (*The Knick*) and gave him his first two leading roles in film after he'd been in telly (*Century* and *Close My Eyes*). More recently I worked with Ruth Wilson (*Luther*, *The Affair*) and Rebecca Hall (*Joe's Palace*), and Tom Hardy was in *Gideon's Daughter* early in his career. I gave Gemma Arterton (*Quantum of Solace*) her first role while she was still at drama school.

My stories usually mix younger and older age groups, so I need young actors. Every couple of years there is a crop of exciting young actors coming up, whom you meet at auditions. I'm attracted to people with a bit of charisma, a whiff of danger, and they tend to be the actors who make it.

[The recognition for up-and-coming talent] is also a tribute to Andy Prior, the casting director I have been working with for

the past 20 years. Between us we have scored quite a lot in terms of predicting new people [who have gone on to become stars].

How we cast *Close to the Enemy*

Everybody in *Close to the Enemy* has worked in various projects, but we have cast people in surprising ways.

For instance, Freddy Highmore, a child actor of great success who also had a hit with *Bates Motel*, is one of two male leads. He was a revelation, and we have shown him to be a true leading actor and a real star.

Jim Sturgess has made a lot of films but had hardly worked in television; certainly not since becoming a leading actor. Again, he is cast slightly against type.

Alfred Molina told me he had never played a posh part before, which is extraordinary, and Angela Bassett, playing a singer in the hotel, gives an extraordinary performance, which isn't a surprise. What is, is that she sings all of the songs in the series, but had never sung on screen aside from one small duet, despite being Oscar-nominated for [Tina Turner biopic] *What's Love Got to Do With It*.

The people I have worked with in my career

I started in the theatre when I was very young, so I have obviously worked with a lot of people.

My early experience in writing single TV films meant working with a number of people who were to become well-known directors, like Michael Apted (*Gorillas in the Mist*), Stephen Frears (*Philomena*), [Royal Shakespeare Company founder] Peter Hall and Charles Sturridge (*Shackleton*), who made a *Play for Today* [teleplay] that was mine, right after he had done *Brideshead Revisited*.

The person who changed my career

I wouldn't say there is just one person that has influenced me. But I think the one person that informed me in a particular way was the famous director of photography Chris Menges, who shot *The Killing Fields* and won Oscars. He shot my TV film *Bloody Kids*, which Stephen Frears directed way back when I was only 25.

Chris told me after we'd finished that I should direct my own work. Since he was hugely experienced, and said exactly what he wanted, it made a big impression on me, even though it took me several years to act upon it. It was a real vote of confidence. Chris had seen me on-set with Stephen and realised I had a grasp of the practicalities of filmmaking, so that one encounter informed me more than working with any director has.

My take on the 'golden age of drama'

Obviously there is a lot of drama, and there is money for drama and new outlets like Amazon and Netflix out there. Whether it is a 'golden age' I'm not so sure. That depends on how many works created now have the power to last, and how many are just filling the marketplace. We don't know that yet.

There are obviously some shows like *Breaking Bad* that will last, but whether X, Y and Z, which have big posters all over town because they are being promoted by whichever big outlet, will do so, I don't know.



Close to the Enemy

What I do think is that television is the dominant art form internationally at the moment; it is much more powerful than movies. Obviously *Star Wars* will still make billions, but television drama is much more influential than movies now, and that hasn't always been true. In that sense it is a golden age, because it is a dominant moment.

The reception my shows get

My work may be niche, but it has been of considerable commercial value to broadcasters. I've never courted and written specifically for the American market, but my work has consistently won awards there. *The Lost Prince* won PBS its first drama Emmy for many years, BBC America won Golden Globes for *Gideon's Daughter*, and Starz won a Golden Globe for *Dancing on the Edge*.

Awards are important – especially if you're not a huge broadcaster like HBO or the BBC. It's especially true in America, where channels can use [awards] to boost their profile and subscriber base.

Look at *Breaking Bad* or *Orange is the New Black*: it's usually not the obvious ideas that score. In drama, the least risky strategy is to take a chance on an original idea, not do another pale imitation of whatever is on-trend, which right is Nordic-looking police drama, with officers moping around in the rain with a corpse in the mud.

What I plan to do next

Close to the Enemy is the biggest thing I have done: it's seven hours and a big show. I'm fairly restless to write something contemporary, but on this particular afternoon, I'm not completely sure what I'll do next. **S**



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Zero hour

Braquo's Olivier Marchal and EuropaCorp Television co-president Thomas Anargyros on how they created €16 million French-language post-apocalyptic thriller drama *Section Zero*, a selection at the first MIPDrama Screenings

There is a “violent undercurrent” to Olivier Marchal’s new dystopian thriller drama *Section Zero*, the French writer-director says. While plotlines naturally changed between its initial inception in 2012 and production in early- to mid-2015, the basic concept of a police unit “as screwed up as the universe they live in” remained.

“It became the story of a group of idealistic cops – using sometimes questionable tactics – who do all they can to survive in a world of human barbarity in the hope and gut-ridden belief in a better tomorrow,” he says.

Section Zero is set in 2024 in a Europe that has given up the idea of state governance in favour of putting massive multinational companies in charge. One of these, Prométhée, plans to replace the police with its own private militias, a move that executive producer Thomas Anargyros of EuropaCorp Television explains would finally cut ties with social and political systems of the past.

The plot follows an idealistic law enforcement officer (played by Swedish actor Ola Rapace), who takes command of a clandestine, elite squadron that battles the forces of corporate evil, while dealing with the shooting of his daughter and the public exposure of his darkest secrets.

“The series is set in a world where people kill each other for anything, where cops get up in the morning not knowing if they will live to see the evening,” says the César-nominated Marchal, who was behind *Braquo*, the France 3 drama that Zodiak Rights sold with great success around the world.

“My inspiration came from my favorite films: *Les Fils de l’homme* for its light, as well as *Blade Runner*, but my main influence was *Mad Max*,” says Marchal of eight-part *Section Zero*’s tone. “*Mad Max* was a first for showing the mortality in its characters – the feeling of total despair, fear for the end of the world and savagery, which bears a lot of resonance with how people felt following the catastrophic [real-life] events of 2015.

Without comparing *Section Zero* to that masterpiece, the series does also embody all of this.”

With France’s 2015 book-ended by terrorist atrocities in capital city Paris, Marchal says *Section Zero* will celebrate the work of the country’s real police force. “We applauded them after the January 7 attacks, and it was deserved because their acts were heroic,” he says. “But actually they are heroes all the time.”

According to Anargyros, whose EuropaCorp company was drafted into the project directly by Marchal and his new prodco, Bad Company, *Section Zero* is one of the biggest-budget French-language dramas ever shot, costing €2 million (US\$2.2 million) per episode and €16 million overall.

French pay TV operator Canal+ and its production cousin Studiocanal are investors, with the latter taking distribution rights. Belgian film and TV financier Umedia also bought in, with an unnamed broadcaster from the country understood to be involved. EuropaCorp, best known for the *Transporter* and *Taken* film franchises, and Bad Company rounded out the financing.

Shooting took place in Bulgaria, in a huge industrial estate three-quarters of an hour from the capital Sofia. “This gave us the post-apocalyptic atmosphere I was looking for,” says Marchal. The majority of the interior and exterior scenes were, however, shot at Sofia’s Nu Boyana Studios, which is owned by LA’s Millennium Films. “With storms and temperatures often below freezing, we could never have gotten through 98 days of filming solely at the [industrial] site,” says Marchal.

Though season one is yet to debut, Marchal says a second run of the highly-serialised drama is in development. Featuring the lead cop, Sirius, it will, Marchal says, “be about a fugitive with nothing left to lose, whom everyone wants to eliminate”. **S**



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A (Movi) star is born

A new player is joining Europe's top drama producers: Spain's leading pay TV platform Movistar Plus has committed to launching eight original series a year, starting in 2017. Domingo Corral, Movistar Plus' original production director, tells TBI about this strategic bet

Movistar Plus' premium TV fiction foray kicked off in January when Alberto Rodríguez's *La Peste* (*The Plague*), a thriller set in bustling 16th century Seville, went into production.

The show is written by Rafael Cobos (7 *Virgins*) and produced with José Antonio Féliz's Atípica Films. It is one of over 20 premium dramas that Movistar is developing.

These include projects from film producers David Trueba (*Living is Easy with Eyes Closed*) and Cesc Gay (*Truman*), plus another by actor and celebrity Berto Romero (*Spanish Affair 2*).

Owned by telco giant Telefonica, Movistar Plus dominates Spanish pay TV. It has 3.7 million subscribers and a 35% market share since formalising, last year, the acquisition of Prisa's pay TV operation, Canal Plus España.

Movistar Plus' VOD service already boasts a strong line-up of international TV dramas, and the production of original series will provide Movistar with what it lacks: high-end, exclusive Spanish scripted TV.

"We want quality dramas produced in Spain, with Spanish talent, that tell the Spanish reality to our audiences," says original production director Domingo Corral.

With Movistar Plus' TV drama commitment, a Spanish pay TV operator is making a serious and sustained investment in original series for the first time, in a territory overwhelmingly dominated by free-to-air broadcasters RTVE, Atresmedia and Mediaset España.

For the telco, original TV series production means added value for its Spanish VOD and pay TV offering, and

at a moment when HBO has unveiled its plans to operate a standalone streaming service in the country, and following the launch of Netflix last October.

"Whoever doesn't make a true bet on local production will have a very limited run, which is what you [ultimately] get with good international TV series," Corral says. "Spaniards first want to see Spanish series, in the same way Americans first want to see US series."

It is unlikely that either Netflix, which will probably produce a series locally in Spain sooner rather than later, or HBO would have the muscle or inclination to match the volume of production announced by Movistar in the immediate future, which hands a competitive advantage to the Spanish pay TV operator.

In fact, the ambitious plans for original TV series production place Movistar Plus closer to the level of Europe's other big pay TV players, Sky and Canal Plus.

"The biggest TV series of today incorporate the way cinema tells stories, which is exactly what we want to do," Corral says. "This means tackling TV projects with cinema-level production standards, opening up to creators with an original point of view and a story to tell, with great characters and actors, making the screenwriter one of the stars."

"Our aim, in the mid term, is to rub shoulders with top international producers of quality series," he adds. "This will be possible thanks in great measure to the vast amount of Spanish talent [screenwriters, directors, photographers] we have in our industry."

Movistar Plus' TV drama plans are also built on a solid TV industry rationale.



Spanish scripted shows lead the competitive local primetime segment, and are increasingly in demand internationally. "The Spanish TV market is producing very good fiction, and we come, humbly, to try to help enrich that audiovisual landscape," says Corral.

In its venture into original series production, Movistar is open to teaming with film and TV production companies, and even with the big free-to-air TV broadcasters.

"If we want to produce highly ambitious projects, maybe it is worth sitting down to talk," says Corral, who worked at Turner Broadcasting before taking up his current post.

La Peste, a six-episode series that will premiere in the autumn of 2017 on Movistar,



is being produced by Madrid-based Atípica Films, Spain's leading arthouse outfit, whose productions include Alberto Rodríguez's 2013 acclaimed film thriller *Marshland*.

Movistar will be the 100% owner of series rights, a model it aims to repeat in future projects.

Meanwhile, Movistar Plus' scripted slate will be an even split of one-hour dramas and 30-minute comedies.

The pay TV operator is open to all kinds of issues and stories in its productions, it says, and will commit to series aimed at specific segments of its audiences.

Also, the company will bet on new Spanish talent. Corral declines to reveal Movistar's

TV drama budgets, but says his production philosophy "will guarantee an environment where creators can work with time, freedom and resources".

"Since these will be series with high production values, we think they will also have an international run," he adds.

"We would like to contribute to strengthening the European TV fiction market as a second priority, by betting on the production of English-language projects," says Corral. "That is something we are talking about with Canal Plus and Sky."


Movistar Plus aims to release one big English-language series per year; the rest will be in Spanish, and will also include TV

projects involving Latin American talent and production partners. "We are exploring the possibilities of producing TV drama projects in Latin America," Corral says.

In the search for possible alliances in the region, Movistar Plus is considering a wide range of options.

The most obvious partnership would be with any of Telefonica's Latin American pay TV operations. In Central America, Colombia, Peru and Chile, the company operates under the Movistar brand, and in Brazil, via Vivo. Telefonica also owns Argentine broadcaster *Telefé*, one of Latin America's biggest film and television producers. **S**

Amazon unveils this season's *Collection*



Post-war Paris, ravaged by conflict and the Nazi occupation, is the setting for a new drama about high fashion. TBI looks at BBC Worldwide, Amazon and France Télévisions' first coproduction *The Collection*, as the golden age of drama and golden age of couture collide

The Collection is on-trend, with big-ticket period dramas such as *Versailles*, *War and Peace* and *Deutschland 83* remaining in vogue. This upcoming eight-parter is literally in fashion: it tells the story of an illustrious design house emerging from a re-energised Paris in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

Murderland scribe Kate Croft has a deal with *War and Peace* prodco Lookout Point, and through that worked up *The Collection* with Oliver Goldstick, the US writer behind another fashion-infused drama, *Lipstick Jungle*, which ran for two seasons on NBC in the US.

Amazon may be shy with viewing figures, but it is, Lookout Point's Vaughan says, "a magnet for talent". The show follows two brothers, Paul and Claude Sabine, played by Richard Coyle (*Crossbones*) and Tom Riley (*Da Vinci's Demons*), as they build the new fashion business. The cast also includes Frances de la Tour (*Vicious*) as a ruthless matriarch,

and Mamie Gummer (*The Good Wife*) as Paul's American wife.

"When you talk to writers, you can tell if this is the thing they most want to do, and I could feel that level of passion and commitment with this," says Lookout Point CEO Simon Vaughan. He adds that although the real-life emergence of post-war fashion houses informed the show, Croft and Goldstick have created a fictional family and business.

"It is inspired by Dior and Chanel, but is an original drama about fictional characters," he says. "It is set against a world that is true to what it was, socially and politically. In part, it is a story about Paris, and we're confident we have been true to that; France Télévisions, as France's national broadcaster, wouldn't have been involved unless it was authentic and legitimate."

France Télévisions will air the show, which is being shot in English, on France 3. The channel has had some success with UK dramas, including



In focus

Format: 8x60mins series from Lookout Point, BBC Worldwide, France Télévisions, Amazon and Federation Entertainment. BBCWW has international sales rights

Cast: Richard Coyle (*Crossbones*), Tom Riley (*Vinci's Demons*), Mamie Gummer (*The Good Wife*) and Frances de la Tour (*Vicious*)

Inspector Morse and *Vera*, and has recently acquired BBC drama *Happy Valley* and the upcoming ITV reboot of *Maigret*.

The French public broadcaster, through its in-house production division MFP, is one of many broadcasters around the world keen to become a coproducer of scale. This is the first project jointly led by its international copro unit, headed by Médéric Albouy; France 3's drama unit, managed by Anne Holmes and Pierre Merle; and Toma de Matteis at MFP.

Pascal Breton's Federation Entertainment is the French production partner, with Breton and Anne Thomopoulos (*Borgia*) exec producers.

Goldstick, meanwhile, has a deep trough of US TV credits, including *Ugly Betty*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Pretty Little Liars*. Decamping to Wales, where *The Collection* is largely shot, was literally and figuratively a big move for the US scribe. "It was a departure for me, because I'm used

to working in the US studio system," he says.

The straight-to-series model appealed to Goldstick. "The whole attraction was doing a series rather than a pilot," he says. "I've done hundreds of episodes of US television, but never had the luxury of writing all of the episodes in advance, because of the nature of the way things are done in the US."

Though series was shot in Wales – Pinewood Wales is an investor in the project – as well as in Paris, director Dearbhla Walsh (*Penny Dreadful*) went to great lengths to ensure the look was right, according to Vaughan. "It's not a cod approximation of Paris," he says.

The fashion houses that became famous worldwide post-war were all aware of the potential of the market beyond their home territory, giving *The Collection* an inherent international appeal, Goldstick says. "The likes of Dior and Balenciaga knew that the new world was very important," Goldstick says, "and there is something very American about this story; it's an entrepreneurial fable about something that became an enormous success very quickly, and whether the family behind it can survive that."

Goldstick, also the series' showrunner, says the period setting also adds to the dramatic possibilities, and the contrasts of high fashion and a city being rebuilt. "Fashion becomes a metaphor for survival and shows one way people reinvent themselves after the war," he says.

Amazon made *The Collection* its first UK-originated original drama. The streaming service had, however, worked with Lookout Point and the BBC on *Ripper Street*, another period drama, albeit in a completely different genre – crime.

BBC Worldwide is an investor in Lookout Point and backs its projects. Liam Keelan, head of scripted at the commercial arm of the UK pubcaster, says it quickly saw the potential in *The Collection*.

"The competition for really high-end content is fiercer than ever," he says, "so we feel the need to be involved at a very early stage, and we said this has got something that felt a bit special, and talked about a world that hasn't really been seen. It felt distinctive in the market, and we saw it as a big-budget, returnable series."

Amazon's involvement makes the drama unusual for Worldwide, in that it did not have a traditional UK broadcaster, although UK rights are up for grabs after Amazon's window. "It has been a new kind of project for us in that it didn't have a traditional UK broadcaster, although we hope it will play in the UK [beyond Amazon]," Keelan says.

What the Amazon connection does mean is that the BBC Worldwide sales execs will not be heading into meetings armed with a raft of ratings data, viewing demos and the other traditional tools of the distribution trade – it is not even known how many subscribers Amazon has signed up to its subscription streaming service.

The flip-side is the algorithm-based commissioning favoured by Amazon – this isn't one of its subscriber-reviewed pilots – means hard data exists somewhere that shows there is demand for this type of show.

"We don't quite know how it will play out with [buyers] who might be interested in it after the Amazon window, we just have to trust in the quality of the writing and talent behind it," says Keelan.

Should the series prove popular, there is then the material for new seasons for years to come, with Goldstick having a multi-season arc planned. With a MIPTV screening and dinner at the exclusive Château de la Napoule, with cast in attendance, buyers will soon decide whether they have designs on this year's *Collection*. **S**



Roots' cause

A+E Networks' remake of seminal 1977 miniseries *Roots* could play a more important role than just being interesting television, say its producers

#OscarsSoWhite. The hashtag, created to highlight the complete lack of diversity in the top acting awards categories at the 2016 Academy Awards, is now as synonymous with the ceremony in February as Leonardo DiCaprio's long-awaited Best Actor win.

"This is the environment in the US," says A+E Studios president Bob DeBitetto. He is referring to the climate in which A+E Networks is producing a reboot of the 1977 ABC miniseries *Roots*.

The original has gone down in television and US cultural history, telling the generational story of African slaves stolen from the continent in the 18th century and forced to endure horrendous boat voyages across violent seas and then sold into a lifetime of slave labour in the American South.

"We began to feel in development that especially right now, race relations and the challenges we face as a nation make this story more relevant than it's ever been before," says DeBitetto, who launched A+E Studios in 2013. "As we look forward we feel we have got the ability to engage people on the issue. We can add something of value to the debate around race in America today."

It is 40 years next January since the original four-part miniseries aired on ABC. At that time, the network was so concerned about the project that it was scheduled to run on consecutive nights in order to burn through before important ratings battles later in the season. *Roots*, however, became the third-highest-rated broadcast in US TV history and started a cultural revolution around slavery education.

Part of the rationale behind bringing it back, DeBitetto says, is that A+E "is literally bringing it to a new generation". He says Mark Wolper, son of original producer David Wolper and who has "co-controlled and protected the legacy of the brand over the years", realised that his teenage children were part of an entire generation that "knew nothing" about the programme.

"Two-thirds of the country hasn't seen it," says DeBitetto.

The A+E channels group is putting significant weight behind the launch, handing it a Memorial Day (May 30) 9pm slot and running it over four nights. It will simulcast on History, A&E and Lifetime. "We have seen enough to think we have got something quite special, so we wanted to reach the widest possible audience," says DeBitetto. "Memorial Day is perhaps the best time of the year to launch a show for History. Given the scope and importance, we have mobilised the entire resource of our company around it."

A+E is positioning each two-hour episode as a mini-film that will add up to a miniseries. Phillip Noyce, Mario Van Peebles, Thomas Carter and Bruce Beresford each direct one 120-minute programme, with the likes of Forest Whitaker, Anna Paquin, Laurence Fishburne, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Matthew Goode and Mekhi Phifer all starring. British actor Malachi Kirby has bagged the iconic lead role of Kunta Kinte.

The first Kinte, LeVar Burton, who has become an ambassador for *Roots'* cultural importance, is one of a large number of producers attached to the project. DeBitetto says the auspices line-up represents the huge collaborative effort that went into creating the show, which A+E will debut internationally as a wholly-owned property. "We had 750 people – including a hugely diverse selection of writers, directors and actors – employed over two continents, with the African scenes shot in South Africa," he says.

While A+E's *Roots* shares its name with the original, DeBitetto says it should not be considered a remake. "We felt there was an opportunity to bring new perspective and depth to the modern *Roots*," he says.

"The last thing we wanted was an unoriginal remake. We wanted to reimagine it with the 40 years of history that have intervened. We're trying to go back to the source material, the Alex Haley book, and render that in an unvarnished and brutally honest way." **S**



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Monte Carlo's TV circuit

The Monte-Carlo TV Festival wants to be for television what the Cannes Film Festival is for movies. TBI speaks to the organisers about the upcoming edition of the talent-packed and (hopefully) sun-drenched week in Monaco



"When I became the head of the festival in 2012, I decided we needed to bring it to the same level as the Festival de Cannes, but for TV," says Laurent Puons, CEO of Monaco Mediacorp, the organiser of June's Monte-Carlo Television Festival.

That cause has been helped by the global rise of drama; a point not lost on Puons. "There is a lot of money in TV series now, and a lot of big actors involved such as Kevin Spacey and John Travolta," he says. "I think Spacey earns more in *House of Cards* than when he worked in film, and in the future you will see the likes of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise coming to TV, and not just as producers.

"TV series are more important than feature films, and you can see them on numerous platforms, whether that's Netflix, Amazon or something else, meaning TV actors are more watched than film actors."

The other industry trend fuelling a get-together like the Monte-Carlo Television Festival is the need, in an era of mega-budgets for drama, for different parties to join forces and coproduce.

"There is now an obligation to do coproduction," says Puons. "If you want to succeed you must group with others, and that

is another role for the Monte-Carlo Television Festival: to bring international partners together in the same place."

The festival boss is fully aware that the calendar of international film and TV events is a busy one, and that his event is close to several others. He contends that Monte-Carlo has a different role from other markets and content confabs.

been created to award an actor for his or her body of work, with Donald Sutherland and Patricia Arquette the two recipients thus far.

Gareth Neame, boss of *Downton Abbey* producer Carnival Films, and *Hunter* star Stephanie Kramer are both involved as judges this year.

The proximity to the Cannes film and TV events also means the Monte-Carlo organisers

"When I became the head of the festival in 2012, I decided we needed to bring it to the same level as the Festival de Cannes, but for TV."

Laurent Puons

"During MIP and Cannes there are markets, and buyers and sellers can do good business, but after that they need to promote their products," he says. "Monte-Carlo is an exclusive place to communicate about new content and series, and there is lots of press from around the world to talk about these in comfortable surroundings."

In an effort to raise the public profile of the Golden Nymphs, the accolades given to best-in-class drama and news content, the Monte-Carlo TV Festival has installed actors in the judging juries.

The number of juries has also been trimmed from four to two, and a Crystal Nymph has

need to pitch the conference component, named the ConTech Academy, carefully.

"The Monte-Carlo TV Festival is very close to MIPTV and to the Festival de Cannes, so it is a challenge to put the right business content in place, and to be different," Puons says. "But we think we have done this with the ConTech Academy. There will be keynotes, panels and workshops, and it will allow executives, producers and innovators to interact in a convivial atmosphere.

"There will be fresh perspectives on trends and digital development, and a producer forum that looks at coproduction, distribution and monetising content across platforms." **S**





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Emerging from the shadows: Brazilian drama

Brazil's TV industry, widely and unwisely dismissed as primarily a source of telenovelas, has been revolutionised by a quota system that obliges every channel in the country to broadcast a total of 5% of productions made by Brazilian independents, reports Gary Smith

Alongside a requirement that 5% of content be sourced locally, legislation has also been introduced in Brazil offering tax breaks for both local companies and multi-nationals that invest in content production from the indie sector. Then the Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual (FSA) was established to help fund independent productions. Three years after these changes were implemented, the country's indies are bucking Brazil's economic meltdown by thriving and diversifying.

As their confidence grows, they are looking to compete in the global market of high-end, appointment drama.

There is also a more basic trend driving today's production boom, which, incidentally also includes the film and kids sectors: channel proliferation. "Creatively speaking, there has always been the will to produce quality series and compete on the international market, but now, thanks to the success of pay TV and OTT services, there is more space, and more channels," Rachel

do Valle, executive manager at the industry group Brazilian TV Producers/ABPI-TV, says. "The Brazilian independent sector is starting to become a significant producer of drama for the global market. It's still early days, of course, but internally you have channels such as GNT, which plays lots of fiction and drama, and HBO, which is doing very well regionally with *O Negócio*, produced by São Paulo-based Mixer. Intro Pictures has just teamed up with Turner to produce *O Lei (The Law)* for the Space



No Way Back

channel, Turner's pan-Latin platform." The latter is claimed to be the highest-budget TV production ever from Brazil, and the green-lighting of the series was undoubtedly helped by the regional success of *O Negócio*.

BossaNova Films produces drama for local and regional channels including GNT, HBO, Rede Globo, Rede Record, TV Cultura, Fox, Discovery Channel and Canal Futura. GNT's *Neighbours* (*Vizinhos*) is currently waiting to see if it gets a second season, while a third season of *3 Teresas* has just been confirmed. "On top of that we have two new TV series in pre-production," BossaNova Films partner and head of entertainment Denise Gomes says. "*De Perto Ninguém é Normal* (*Nearly No One is Normal*) mashes up fiction and



3 Teresas



Neighbours

documentary, breaking down barriers between those two genres in a light, funny and entertaining way. We expect it to be released in August this year, while *Há Vagas para o Amor* (*Vacancies For Love*) features stand-alone episodes linked by a narrator.

Each episode starts with a real event, around which a fictional story is created, and we are planning to go into production with it around the second semester."

Luiz Villaça, a partner and creative director of entertainment at BossaNova, is behind

both projects, and all four shows are coproductions with the GNT channel. “We are also hoping to see them perform well on export, because we take into account what the international markets want with every TV project that we get involved in,” says Gomes.

So is the growth in drama production in Brazil mainly due to the new laws? “Of course, the legislation has helped to heat up the market, simply because international channels with scripted slots on their schedule have started to produce here to comply with the quota,” says Gomes. “Plus, the opportunities opened up by the Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual have also helped channels to make productions by completing the investment needed. Consequently, Brazil is nicely placed to establish itself as a regional centre of TV excellence over the next few years. However, we need to work hard, take full advantage of the financial opportunities, and focus on development, research and the quality of the screenplay. Also, the way that we handle our IP rights is very important if the sector wants to be genuinely competitive on the international market.”

Carlos De Andrade, executive producer at Rio de Janeiro prodco Visom Digital, agrees. “The Brazilian audiovisual policy has created a significant influx of coproduction

money from studios like NBCUniversal, Turner, HBO, Fox and Discovery, to name just a few,” he says. “Their demands are immensely important for the evolution of local producers, who now understand that, as an industry, their content has to have strong production values, plus clear results in the domestic market and genuine international appeal.”

It’s one thing to comprehend the needs of the global market, but equally it’s important to remain in some way Brazilian. “Generally speaking,” says De Andrade, “the demand for stories that are a bit different and that are told in a different way has never been stronger, and Brazilian dramas and comedies, even when dealing with truly global matters, undeniably have traces of our culture and way of life in their DNA. Added to that, there’s an immense global curiosity created by the internet, and that means that millennials are no longer locked into looking exclusively for content in their own language. They are curious about new cultures, and that’s to some degree where Brazil’s opportunity lies.”

De Andrade coproduced the first season of 4K blockbuster *Guardian Council* with Brazilian free-to-air broadcaster TV Record, and the second season with Record and NBCU, which is now the distributor for Latin America. Currently, says De Andrade, sales

negotiations are ongoing with broadcasters in Finland, South Korea, Spain and the USA.

4K is still quite rare in drama, so what made him decide to use it? “For TV viewing, 4K is the pinnacle of the TV viewing experience, and we are going to be living with it for years to come,” he says. “From the broadcaster’s side, OTT will gain even more ground over traditional cable and satellite TV by offering 4K/UHD, so it would be silly of me not to use it. Soon we are going to see the value of the HD format dropping significantly, in the same way that today we can no longer sell our SD content for a reasonable price. This country is helping me to invest in 4K content, and as an executive producer it is my duty to guarantee my investors’ income for as long as I can.”

Visom is also developing four new drama projects: *Gangs of Rio*, *The Nortons*, *Voting Ballot* and *Aphrodisiac*.

Fresh from completing *Little Secret*, Ocean Films’ first feature film, executive producer Cristian Marini points to *City of God* as a gamechanger for the Brazilian audiovisual industry. “After the success of that film, everything changed,” he says. “The government started offering incentives for TV and movie production, and that is at the root of what we are currently seeing – a very complex and productive sector, with



Little Secret



Guardian Council

huge companies like Petrobras and Banco do Brasil becoming major investors, simply because they can get tax relief by doing so.

“So, on the one hand you have institutional support plus money from private companies and venture capital funds, and, on the other hand, an enormous local and global demand for quality content.

“Of course, after years of making our living from shooting commercials, we are more than happy to join in. But it’s something we’ve been thinking about and planning for at least five years, and since we completed *Little Secret*, we have lined up several TV drama projects and have a documentary for a major US company in pre-production.”

Little Secret tells the true story of a globe-trotting Brazilian family, the Shermans, who stumble across a young couple in a desperate situation due to a blood transfusion that infected them with AIDS. The film was directed by the real-life couple’s son, David Sherman, and is distributed globally by Diamond Films.

Production companies Chatrone, founded and run by Carina Schulze, and Mara Lobão’s Panoramica, had previously worked together on kids content, which has now led directly to the duo working together again on *Sem Volta* (*No Way Back*), for the adult drama market.

“It’s a primetime show coproduced with TV Record, and it’s about how people react in extreme situations; how the coolest person at the outset is not necessarily the best at dealing with stress,” Schulze says.

“Our version of the show is set in the mountains near Rio and is based around what happens to a group of rock climbers caught in a cataclysmic rainstorm, which leads to landslides. It’s a very ambitious project, with some scenes shot in 4K, and it is totally character-driven. That sort of situation could take place anywhere in the world due to any kind of disaster, so consequently our plan is to sell the series as a format.”

The fact that such a show exists at all is also very much a result of the current state

of the indie sector. “One thing that always held Brazilian producers back in the past was the fact that there just weren’t that many good writers around, but that is no longer the case,” Schulze says.

“Plus, from a pure business point of view, we are seeing that Brazilian channels are much more prepared to take risks with content, because there’s clear evidence that these domestic successes are driving subscription uptake”.

Lobão’s Panoramica is also working on a drama series with Universal Brazil as coproducer.

“*Trails of Hate* is based around a real police station in São Paulo that deals exclusively with all kinds of hate crimes,” says Lobão. The project started out as a documentary, but it rapidly became clear that this would lead to huge problems with the people being filmed. Therefore, we made it into a 10x60mins drama series, which is currently being shot, and I’ll be bringing some episodes to MIPCOM later this year.” **S**



The Writer

MENA creative boom beckons

Artistic experimentation in the Middle Eastern scripted market is booming. TBI assesses a new form of Turkish novella and an Israeli drama written by a Palestinian scribe

Turkey and Israel dominate television in the Middle East and North Africa region: new stats show Turkey and Israel account for more than 70% of the region's pay TV subs. The Turkish drama export market brought in more than US\$250 million for the first time last year, while Israeli creators have spawned Showtime's *Homeland*, USA Network's *Dig* and now the BBC's new effort *The A Word*.

Two new dramas, one from each territory, hitting the market early this year are attempting to keep up the momentum.

Intersection is a new type of action-focused semi-telenovela for Turkish pay TV, while *The Writer* is from the perspective of a Palestinian

Arab writing for the Israeli broadcast market.

Hakan Eren from producer Endemol Shine Turkey is setting extremely high targets for *Intersection*, which debuted to excellent ratings on Fox in Turkey earlier this year and is set for an exclusive screening at MIPTV.

"It's very, very important for the Turkish market as well as for Endemol Shine Turkey," says Eren, the Endemol Shine-owned prodco's chief commercial officer. "There have been successful Turkish shows, but we want to break sales records with this. We believe *Intersection* will be a pillar of the Turkish export market, as the production values are so high."

So what's the set-up? Known locally as *Kordugum*, the series is a love story running

to 13 two-hour episodes that aims to show the dark underbelly of Turkey's beautiful capital city, Istanbul, where money is too often the deciding factor. The plots follows the love triangle of a ruthless playboy businessman, a talented but humble automotive designer caught up in the so-called glamour of a new industry, and his wife, an idealistic young pediatrician.

The woman divorces her husband after his personality changes for the worse and soon starts a relationship with the playboy, who becomes determined to change his ways and settle down, especially after an unexpected development. "The rich man becomes more loving and caring as the poorer guy becomes

angrier and gains power,” explains Eren. “They change places and swap roles – *Intersection*.”

“The key theme is love itself,” he adds. “All Turkish dramas have that. They have family relationship and adventure elements, but are not action series like this. *Intersection* is like a telenovela, but distinguished from them by the production quality. The adventure is there for people to get excited about.”

Distributor Endemol Shine International, a sister company of both Endemol Shine Turkey and Fox through their shared stakeholder 21st Century Fox, is shopping the show after selling another Turkish drama, *Broken Pieces*, to more than 30 territories.

Savvy market watchers may recognise the name of female lead Belçim Bilgin, who is set to appear with Ben Kingsley and Jacqueline Bisset in Hollywood movie *Backstabbing for Beginners*. They may also recognise Emmanuel Kadosh, *Intersection*’s director of photography, who is working with Andy Garcia on new feature *Hemingway & Fuentes*.

It should be no real surprise, then, that Eren says critics have likened *Intersection*’s tonal and visual feel to “watching a movie”.

Over in Israel, commentators have been taken by *The Writer*, which Dori Media Paran produced for Keshet Broadcasting and IBA.

Newspaper Haaretz called it “beautiful, like only a unique one-time thing can be”, while TimeOut Israel wrote that it “looks reality in the eyes”. The NRG newspaper was more unequivocal, claiming it was “the best drama on screen” in Israel.

What makes these comments more striking is that the screenwriter, Sayed Kashua, is a Palestinian who lived and worked in Israel before moving to the US. He is known for creating *Arab Labor*, an award-winning comedy that ran for four seasons, but *The Writer* takes a more dramatic approach.

“*Arab Labor* was the first show to a Palestinian life to mainstream Israeli television viewers,” says Kashua. “It needed lots of humour to bring it into the living room, but after four seasons we were at the point where we could do something else. The political situation was also getting more extreme, and it didn’t feel that making a comedy was the right thing to do.”

The Writer is a semi-autobiographical drama that screened as part of the Special

Series Selection at Berlinale 2016 in February.

The 10x25mins show follows a Palestinian living in Israel and struggling with his sense of identity, nationality and belonging. While his marriage is happy and writing career successful, the lead wonders if he’s caught in a bourgeois nightmare and whether he is liked only for the fact that he’s ‘the right’ Arab in the right place at the right time.

“More than anything else, this is about me being honest with my feelings,” says Kashua. “Everything is political in a place like Israel. Politics even impact on personal relationships and decisions such as where your daughter goes to school.”

The Writer doesn’t scream ‘international hit’, but it was well received in Berlin, and Kashua says the writing could transcend borders, as it is both universal in theme and touches on the hot-button topics of the moment.

“The more specific and human the writing you produce is, the more universal the project will become,” he says. “This hybrid condition I write about could be linked to the narratives of immigration and identity – how can one fit in and assimilate?” **S**



Drama's Dirty Dozen emerge from Serial Eyes

As well as a popular 1967 war movie, the Dirty Dozen is a 12-strong collective of up-and-coming drama writers from Europe who came through the second-edition Serial Eyes, a post-graduate TV drama course run by the German Film and Television Academy (and partnered with the London Film School and National Film School of Denmark).

Working together and in writers' rooms as part of Serial Eyes, the students realised that, when it comes to drama, the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts. That is why they have formed a collective of scripted scribes and producers, with each working on solo projects but also coming together as required to workshop ideas and form US-style writers' rooms.

"Serial Eyes was very intense, but a very positive experience with a real creative energy," says Dirty Dozen member Korbinian Hamberger. "When it was coming to an end, we started thinking about how to keep that spirit alive and that energy going."

A loose collective, the members come together as necessary on a project-by-project basis. Berlin is where they studied and met, and the German capital city is a focal point for the activity of the Dozen. But there are also representatives from France, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Slovakia and the UK.

What the collective isn't, is a production company. "We are 12 writers," says Hamberger. "We have our own projects, and also others with the group, and if people want to hire writers, we are a kind of creative pool. We can see how the Americans put together a writers' room and we want to do that, and we can put together a team that all bring different skills. You can create so much energy when you play ideas back and forth; it can introduce diversity and take them to a whole different level."

While the Serial Eyes grads are up-and-comers, they are not new to TV (the course is specifically for writers with some experience). Hamberger, for example, was a staff writer on German soap *Dahoam is Dahoam*, while Wiktor Piatkowski is one of the creators of HBO Poland's first original drama, *Wataha*. Several others have notable TV, film and theatre credits.

The Dirty Dozen held a networking event during the recent Berlinale International Film Festival and are building a profile in the drama business as they look to get in on domestic projects and copros.

"The whole world of drama is getting smaller and moving to coproduction, and that is where I want to work," Hamberger says. "The new world of copros means there are bigger and better projects, and there is a lot of opportunity out there. It is opening up with more acceptance of subtitles or projects in different languages. We are all



young-ish and hungry and have new ideas."

Hamberger personally is also keen to continue working in the fast-evolving German market, in which Amazon Prime Instant Video, Netflix and Sky are all now commissioning. He is working on a post-war crime series, *The Constable*. He also has a drama-comedy that has made it through an open-submission process at ProSiebenSat.1, with the next stage delivering a bible and pilot script to the terrestrial German broadcaster.

As with their movie namesakes, the Dozen were trained by a grizzled bunch of experts, but where their celluloid equivalents had Lee Marvin and Ernest Borgnine giving the orders, the TV writers were licked into shape by showrunners including Frank Spotnitz (*Man in the High Castle*), Jimmy Desmarais (*The Returned*) and Tom Fontana (*Oz*).

The projects they have worked on so far include *Anamnese*, which is with German prodco H&V Entertainment and involves collective members Jana Burbach and Nikolaus Schulz-Dornburg. Elsewhere, utilising four of the 12 – Katerina Gerothanasi, Jasper Marlow, Daniela Baumgaertl and Nikolaus Schulz-Dornburg – there is eight-part comedy

drama *Aristocrats*, which is about a well-off ruling family.

There is also politically incorrect end-of-the-world comedy *Plan B*, from Cécile Kiegel, Baumgaertl and Michaela Strand, and procedural period drama *The Witch Hunter*.

The Dirty Dozen are, then, guns for hire – writers' room mercenaries – and with a healthy slate of projects under way, look set for many more missions. **S**

The Dirty Dozen

Korbinian Hamberger (German)
 Daniela Baumgaertl (German)
 Wiedeke Brünjes (German)
 Jana Burbach (German)
 Katerina Gerothanasi (Greek)
 Cécile Kiegel (French)
 Jasper Marlow (British/Australian)
 Maja Pek (Croatian)
 Wiktor Piatkowski (Polish)
 David Robert (French)
 Nikolaus Schulz-Dornburg (German)
 Michaela Strand (Slovak)

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Writer's Room:

Relating a royal life to the masses

British producer and novelist Daisy Goodwin's first screenplay is for upcoming ITV and PBS period drama *Victoria*, which Mammoth Screen is making. Previously, she founded and ran UK factual indie Silver River

At the beginning of 2015 I was writing a novel set in 1870. I was stuck, so to distract myself I picked up a volume of Queen Victoria's diaries. "How handsome Albert looks in his white cashmere breeches," wrote the teenage queen on November 11, 1839, "with nothing on underneath." Suddenly the image of the boot-faced old lady in a bonnet was replaced by this frisky young woman who had spotted her Mr Right.

The next day I had a fight with my teenage daughter, who like Victoria is a small but mighty five-foot-nothing, and I found myself thinking what it would be like if overnight she became the most powerful woman in the world. This is, of course, what happened to the eighteen-year-old Victoria in 1837 when her uncle William IV died. The image of the teenage queen was irresistible. The first scenes were writing themselves in my head.

Victoria is my first screenplay. I had worked as a documentary producer for years and I have written a couple of historical novels, but drama was new territory for me. I had studied the Victorian era at university, so I had pretty good feel for the period: my aim was to keep the scripts true to the spirit of the age and the emotional truth of the characters, even if I altered the chronology a little to make a better dramatic shape.

I spent a lot of time looking at the early Victorian equivalent of the tabloid press, trying to figure out what people believed at the time about the monarchy, before it was smoothed out by hindsight.

The relationship between Victoria and Lord Melbourne, her first Prime Minister, is central to my story. The biographies tend to gloss over the intensity of their friendship, but at the time, Victoria was regularly lampooned as 'Mrs Melbourne', and the assumption was that Melbourne, a famous ladies' man, had worked his magic on the young queen.

The thing I have learned writing this series is that the most important thing is emotional truth



And if you read her diaries, which were redacted by her youngest daughter after her death, it's clear even from the passages that survive that the teenage monarch had a massive crush on the charming 'Lord M', as she called him.

My aim with *Victoria* was to strip away the reverence that tends to stultify royalty on screen and show a young woman struggling with her responsibilities. Victoria was passionate and impulsive, and the first few years of her reign were full of blunders and mistakes.

Now we think of the British monarchy as rock solid, but in the mid-nineteenth century republicanism was sweeping through Europe, and at the time there was real concern that a young inexperienced girl would not be able to keep it together. That uncertainty is something I have worked with in my scripts.

A dramatic challenge has been giving a sense of the world outside Buckingham Palace, so I have created a downstairs world of fictional characters whose stories are interwoven with that of Victoria and her family. Through them we see the immense social and economic change that is going on in the country – Victoria comes to the throne in the age of carriages and candles; when she dies there is electric light and motorcars.

Although she was a creature of her time, Victoria faced some very modern dilemmas – how do you make a marriage work when you have all the power? Is it possible to be a good mother and do your job properly? In her diaries she writes touchingly about her nervousness at being the one who has to propose marriage to Albert.

The thing I have learned writing this series is that the most important thing is emotional truth; my Victoria, played by the incomparable Jenna Coleman, is not an icon, but a flawed young woman learning the hard way how to be a queen. **S**

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